

FCRPS 1999 Decision

This document summarizes the status of ongoing Northwest efforts to recover ESA-listed species as well as efforts to more broadly protect, mitigate and enhance for the effects of the Federal hydrosystem on the region's fish and wildlife. The summary describes work being done in the so-called four Hs (hydro, habitat, harvest and hatcheries) within the broad context of the Federal Caucus, Clean Water Act, Columbia Basin Forum, and the Northwest Power Planning Council's Framework Process.

Processes Linked to 1999 Decision

Federal Caucus:

The Federal Caucus includes National Marine Fisheries Service, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service. The Federal Caucus is developing a multi-species recovery plan that defines Federal obligations consistent with the ESA as well as non-Federal activities necessary for recovery of ESA-listed species in the Columbia Basin.

The Federal agencies have a significant assignment to complete—the development of a new Biological Opinion which is required by the Endangered Species Act. The agencies cannot delegate this specific responsibility. Accordingly, we have adopted a fairly aggressive schedule to identify any gaps that might exist and to allow time to consider interactive effects across the four H's. The intent of the Federal Caucus is to develop a unified Federal approach that benefits from the knowledge and consensus developed by the Framework.

Clean Water Act:

Over the next 10 - 12 years, EPA, the States, tribal governments, other federal agencies, and private landowners are investing millions of dollars in watershed and tributary improvements to meet Clean Water Act requirements. Restoration strategies called Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) are being developed for the Columbia River mainstem and tributaries, based on court orders and negotiated agreements through Clean Water Act litigation. In addition, the federal government has committed to the Clean Water Action Plan which is a federal partnership to promote and enhance locally based watershed improvements. Millions of dollars will be directed at the watershed level through the Clean Water Action Plan to improve water quality, restore habitat and recover threatened and endangered species.

Columbia Basin Forum: Federal, State, and tribal governments are establishing a forum to discuss major Columbia River Basin issues. The parties expect that the Columbia River Basin Forum would also improve the coordination of the many decision processes in the Basin. The parties to the Forum are discussing a collaborative decisionmaking process to address decisions that will be made in 1999 on salmon restoration. The scope of the collaborative effort could

include all sources of mortality, including hydro, habitat, hatcheries, and harvest. The parties are also interested in the effects of salmon restoration efforts on other fish and wildlife.

Twenty of 23 parties have signed the Memorandum of Agreement, with Idaho, the Nez Perce and Umatilla not signing.

Multi-Species Framework: The Multi-Species Framework Project includes states, federal agencies, and tribes with a charge to develop a series of scientifically based alternatives for determining the future of the Columbia River Basin. The alternatives range from options most protective of the ecology to those most protective of the economy. Two workgroups have been formed to analyze each alternative on its ecological and economic merits using agreed-upon methodologies. The alternatives and analysis will serve as a framework for policy decisions on fish and wildlife restoration. For more information about the Framework call 503 820-2349 or log on to www.nwframework.

Products Linked to 1999 Decision

Hydro:

The Draft Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Lower Snake River Juvenile Salmon Migration Feasibility study is expected to be released for public review in late summer/early fall 1999. The original target date of April 1999 was slipped due to a delay in completion of the regional PATH (Plan for Analyzing and Testing Hypotheses) report and consequent delay of the Anadromous Fish appendix. The study analyzes economic, biological, engineering, social and cultural effects of three major alternatives for reconfiguring the four lower Snake River dams (Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental, and Ice Harbor) for improved migration of the listed Snake River salmon species. The alternatives are: (1) maintain existing fish passage systems with planned improvements; (2) implement major improvements at the dams such as surface bypass systems, turbine improvements and/or gas abatement measures; and (3) breach the four dams to return the river to natural level ("natural river drawdown"). The final report and EIS will be completed no sooner than early 2000.

The Corps, Bureau of Reclamation, and Bonneville Power Administration will prepare a biological assessment for the proposed operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System in late summer/early fall of 1999. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will prepare biological opinions prior to the spring migration in 2000. The 1995 NMFS Biological Opinion on hydropower operations and salmon anticipated that biological information would be gathered, and the Corps would complete engineering studies, sufficient to allow decisions in 1999 on future configuration of the lower Snake River dams.

In response to the NMFS 1998 Biological Opinion supplement for steelhead, the Corps has initiated development of a study plan for a Lower Columbia River System Configuration study for improved fish passage. The study would integrate current evaluations of surface bypass technology, juvenile fish guidance efficiency improvements, and other system improvements at the

lower Columbia River dams, into a comprehensive study that may also include drawdowns at John Day and McNary Dams. The range of alternatives and means to evaluate biological benefits will be developed in coordination with the region. The Corps is currently conducting phase I of a potential two-phase study of John Day Dam drawdowns to spillway crest and natural river levels for improved salmon survival. Further evaluation of John Day and/or evaluation of McNary Dam drawdowns could be included in the lower Columbia study scope pending completion of the John Day phase I report and direction from Congress. The NMFS 1998 Biological Opinion supplement for steelhead calls for a status report to narrow the lower Columbia study alternatives by mid-2000, and a final feasibility report by 2004, to include appropriate National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act and recommendations to Congress.

Habitat:

The U.S. Forest Service (FS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manage over 50 percent of the spawning and rearing habitats for salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River Basin. In general, federal lands are in the headwaters, separated from the main Columbia River by private agricultural lands. The importance of federal lands varies between watersheds and depending upon the life history requirements of different fish species (e.g., fall chinook vs. steelhead).

In 1994, the FS and BLM adopted the Northwest Forest Plan which established a consistent aquatic conservation strategy for federal lands on the west side of the Cascade Mountains in Oregon/Washington and Northern California. The Northwest Forest Plan is considered by Oregon as the “anchor” of the habitat component of the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

In 1995, the BLM and FS adopted PACFISH (program that addresses anadromous fish) which significantly improved the protection of salmon habitats on Federal lands in the interior Columbia River Basin by establishing strict standards for land management activities including timber, mining, grazing, road building, fire suppression, etc. The same level of protection was later extended to bulltrout by INFISH (program that addresses resident fish). Several biological opinions by NMFS and the USFWS for listed salmon and trout found that PACFISH and INFISH avoided jeopardy and conserved recovery options until long-term restoration strategies could be established.

The Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) was initiated in 1993 to address broad ecosystem issues in the Columbia River Basin: decline of salmon and other aquatic species; poor forest health leading to catastrophic fires; and the expansion of noxious weeds on degraded rangelands. BLM and FS recognized that these problems were interrelated and must be approached from a landscape, watershed perspective. A major goal of ICBEMP is to bring a consistent ecosystem approach to management by 45 separate FS and BLM administrative units covering 72 million acres (about half of the total area) in eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

To date, the project has produced a comprehensive Science Assessment of the basin, and a draft EIS in May 1997 that analyzed seven management alternatives. A supplemental draft EIS is currently being prepared that will be released in late summer 1999. A final EIS and record of

decision (ROD) are expected in spring 2000. The ICBEMP ROD will replace or incorporate PACFISH/INFISH interim direction with a long-term conservation strategy for federal lands, and will provide an important foundation for state initiatives like the Oregon Plan that address habitat issues on both federal and non-federal lands.

Harvest: The Columbia River Fish Management Plan developed under the *U.S. v Oregon* process expired in December 1998. The parties to the CRFMP (with court approval) has extended the current plan through July 1999. Federal agencies have proposed a schedule to complete negotiations by the end of April 1999. Key issues are likely to include the harvest rates for tribal and non-tribal fisheries, the use of supplementation as a tool to rebuild fisheries, and the allocation of the conservation burden among all the sources of mortality for salmon.

The U.S. and Canadian governments, using both the Pacific Salmon Commission and Special Governmental Negotiating Teams, is working to develop long-term fishing regimes for all the salmon stocks that are intercepted in Southeast Alaska, the West Coast of Canada, and in the Strait of Juan de Fuca in Washington. Representatives of the United States and Canada are reviewing information and developing recommendations to the Commission and the Special Negotiating Teams. The Commission was scheduled to reach agreement by mid-February but is unlikely to reach an agreement before the end of June 1999 – if then. The Alaskan commercial troll fishery for chinook is scheduled to begin on July 1st.

Hatcheries: The Senate Appropriations Committee on Water and Energy directed the Northwest Power Planning Council to conduct a comprehensive review of Federally funded artificial fish production in the Columbia River Basin and to report to Congress the results of that review. The Council has created a Production Review Committee consisting of State and Federal agency representatives, tribes and special interests to serve as a steering committee for the review process. A Scientific Review Panel has prepared an analysis of historic hatchery practices and is currently revising that report based on input from the Production Review Committee. In addition, the Council has released the draft report “NWPPC Artificial Production Policy Statement, Columbia Basin Hatcheries: A Program in Transition” for public review. Following the comment period for the draft report, the Council with the assistance of the Production Review Committee will finalize the report. The Council has committed to coordinate with State and Federal agencies and the Columbia Basin Tribes prior to submission of the final report to Congress in May 1999.

Renegotiations of the Columbia River Fish Management Plan, developed under the *U.S. v. Oregon* process, are addressing artificial production as well as harvest. Artificial production issues being considered include augmentation for harvest and the use of supplementation as a tool to rebuild fisheries.

